



The Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

1015 18th Street, N.W., Suite 200, Washington, D.C., 20036 | 202-349-1498
| www.CaribbeanPac.org

Caribbean-American Political Action Committee (C-PAC) District of Columbia – 2020 Candidate Questionnaire

Please return the completed form via email to cpac.dmv@gmail.com by 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, August 27, 2020. Responses will be shared with C-PAC's membership.

Office Sought: DC Council At-Large

Candidate's Name: Ed Lazere

Current Occupation: Public Policy Analyst/Advocate

Party: Independent

Campaign contact information (Address, Phone, Fax, Email, Website):

Ed Lazere for DC Council At-Large

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1. What specific actions will you take to improve the well-being of your constituents and improve District services and access for all residents?

My top three priorities are

- Housing & homelessness
- Education from early childhood through post-secondary
- Improving the quality of jobs in DC

I would push for a commitment to ending homelessness over 4 years and using all of DC's housing tools to preserve and expand affordable housing for all. I would work to significantly expand affordable housing throughout DC. I would introduce the Reclaim Rent Control platform to strengthen DC's weak program. I would work to create thousands of new publicly owned homes under the social housing model, and fight against privatization of existing public housing.

I would push to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic does not result in any DC resident losing their home -- and to shift a fair share of the economic burden of the pandemic onto real estate owners and financial institutions. I would permanently prohibit evictions for tenants if the only period of rent arrears is in the pandemic and a reasonable recovery period.



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In education, I would work to fully implement DC's Birth-to-3 Act -- to ensure high quality child care, home visiting, and health support for families with low incomes. In PreK-12 education, I would call for fully funding the equity-focused parts of the school funding formula, like at-risk funds. I would work to review the school lottery and admissions process, to advance racial and economic equity (it currently is not at all).

On jobs, we need to acknowledge that our city's history of racism in employment, education, and wealth-building opportunities have left many Black residents in jobs with low-pay, lack of full-time hours, and limited benefits. As a Council member, I would push for universal policies that disproportionately help low-income residents of color, like a higher minimum wage. I would work to make DC's job training system more transparent, and to create better pathways to jobs and careers with good wages, in areas like health care.

2. During recent legislative sessions, the D.C. Council advanced B23-0201, a bill to establish a District of Columbia Office of Caribbean Affairs (OCA), which is a long-standing priority of the Caribbean-American Community. Please explain your position on this legislation and whether you will support efforts to staff and fund the proposed office?

I support this legislation to create the Office of Caribbean Affairs and would support funding and staffing it. Without a specific focus on this important and substantial part of the DC community, we cannot assure that this community will be uplifted or that its unique needs will be met.

I believe it is important to support all ethnic and immigrant communities, including the Caribbean-American community. As someone married to a Caribbean woman (my wife's family is from Guyana), I believe it is especially important to support and uplift the cultural contributions of DC's Caribbean community. As described in answers below, this includes supporting a strong education system, small businesses, and immigrants. I particularly want to make sure the District's supports DC's Caribbean-American cultural heritage. I have fond memories of Georgia Avenue day and feel that its loss leaves a hole in DC's cultural celebrations.

3. What initiatives did you lead or support that impact Washington, D.C.'s Caribbean-American community?



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Through serving on the DC Tax Revision Commission in 2013-14, I supported creating a property tax break for small businesses in DC, which ultimately was adopted by the DC Council.

I have supported strong rights for all immigrants to DC, including supporting the DC Healthcare Alliance program, which serves lower-income residents who do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare, including many immigrants.

While these were not policies directly targeted on Caribbean-American residents, they are policies that particularly benefits Caribbean-Americans.

4. Are you familiar with the status and impact of Caribbean-American owned businesses in your community and throughout Washington, D.C.? How will you support the viability and competitiveness of the City's small, minority, veteran, women, and especially Caribbean-owned businesses? In addition, how will you improve procurement and contract opportunities for these businesses?

Small businesses are the lifeblood of any community and should be supported. I will support small, locally owned businesses, both in the pandemic and beyond. I support passing legislation to permanently prohibit landlords from evicting any tenants who got behind on their rent in the pandemic, knowing that many will never be able to make up for lost income.

Wide wealth inequities mean too many Black and Brown residents lack resources to start a businesses. And existing small businesses in gentrifying neighborhoods, many owned by people of color, are at risk of getting pushed out. I will work to support existing businesses and emerging business owners. I will push to protect Black and brown businesses in gentrifying neighborhoods, and support grants and loans to start small businesses targeted on communities that have been denied wealth-building opportunities. I will work to improve access to capital for small businesses in DC, such as using some of DC's very large fund balance to offer micro-loans.

We need to make sure that DC's CBE program is not taken advantage of by larger businesses that create un-authentic partnerships with small businesses to use the benefits of this program. This includes making sure that small businesses play a large role in any such partnership, and that there is clear evidence that the small business will see lasting gains in its capacity and ability to succeed as a result of this partnership



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5. There are increased concerns regarding violence – especially gun violence – in many parts of the District. What are your proposals to address and stem violence with 21st century tools and policies?

I support the platform of Moms Demand Action for stricter gun control laws, including when someone has been involved in domestic violence, as well as laws requiring safe storage of guns and strong background checks.

I also support investing in community safety using a public health approach. I support the recommendations of the Phase 1 report of the [District Task Force on Jails & Diversion](#), where I served as an advisory member, which found that the keys to reduced incarceration and greater public safety include a stronger safety net, a trauma-informed approach to community needs, an emphasis on community mediation and violence interruption services, improved behavioral health services and more. In particular, I support efforts to break the school-to-prison pipeline, including expanding school-based mental health, rehabilitative justice, and positive behavioral supports in schools.

6. How do you propose increasing access to safe, quality, affordable mental and physical health care and services throughout the District of Columbia?

Through my work at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, which I led from 2001 until March 2020, I advocated for adequate reimbursements to support community-based mental health providers. Those rates continue to be low, so as a Councilmember I would work to increase them. I have advocated for increasing school-based mental health services, and would pursue that as a Council member.

DC has nearly universal health insurance coverage but many residents do not have easy access to health care, like maternal care. I have advocated to provide greater support to DC's public hospital, United Medical Center, and against the closure of Providence Hospital. As a Councilmember, I would work to ensure that the new hospital in Ward 8 provides the full range of services needed by the community, including neonatal care and trauma care.

7. Unfortunately, the challenges and concerns facing immigrants are increasing at an alarming rate. Do you support comprehensive immigration reform? How do you propose addressing the challenges facing DREAMers, the administration's suspension of temporary protective status for many D.C. residents, and the constant threats facing sanctuary cities?

The pandemic has exposed more widely the deep economic, racial, and health inequities that define our nation. That includes policies that target immigrants -- who clearly are critical parts of



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the U.S. economy -- through efforts to detain or deport them and policies that deny them the basic human rights of health care, economic security, and legal protections. I support using this moment to push for permanent protections for undocumented immigrants, with no new funding for deportation. Agencies like ICE and CBP spread fear in our communities, threaten the safety of our neighbors, and separate DC families. Increasing their funding would only exacerbate these policies of hate and undermine our efforts to keep our communities safe.

I support comprehensive immigration reform that allows all immigrants to remain in the U.S. and to provide them full access to public services. Everyone who lives in our community should be welcomed and treated with dignity. Our public policy should be based on loving our neighbors, not treating them as outsiders. The risk of detention for deportation is traumatizing for affected individuals, their friends, and relatives. No one should have to live with that kind of daily fear of feeling hunted. It affects the ability of immigrants to lead a full, happy productive life. Our resources would be better spent supporting immigrant neighbors rather than hunting them down to deport them. Ending detention and deportation would reflect a recognition of the valuable contributions every person makes to their family and community, and the value of keeping them in our community.

8. There is growing attention and distress about the significant increase in lawsuits filed against District residents by debt collectors over the last few years. What is your position on the Debt Buying Limitation Amendment Act, which is pending before the D.C. Council's Committee on Business and Economic Development and the Council's Committee of the Whole?

I fully support this legislation, and as an advocate at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute I have supported other efforts to limit the reach of debt collectors. In particular, I advocated with others to prohibit debt collectors from garnishing wages of people who earn roughly \$200 a week. The new threshold prohibits debt collectors from garnishing wages for anyone earning less than \$600 a week. I would like to raise this threshold higher as a DC Councilmember.

In this pandemic, with so many residents behind on rent, mortgage or other bills, we must strengthen efforts to protect consumers against predatory debt collectors.



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9. What concrete steps will you take to improve the District of Columbia's Public School system – including facilities and equipment, teacher treatment, relationships with parents, as well as education standards and test scores in all wards of the City?

I will champion funding adequacy, equity and transparency. DC schools aren't funded at adequate levels, leading to supplantation of at-risk funds. Sadly, DCPS leaders focus more on making sure all schools have the same (CSM) rather than on at-risk and other special funds needed to give each student what they need. Finally, DCPS will soon change how it allocates funds to schools, and it will be extremely important to ensure that happens with equity and transparency in mind.

I would work to fully implement DC's Birth-to-3 Act -- which I helped advocate for in 2018 -- to ensure high quality child care, home visiting, and health support for families with low incomes. In PreK-12 education, I would call for fully funding the equity-focused parts of the school funding formula, like at-risk funds. I would work to review the school lottery and admissions process, to advance racial and economic equity (it currently is not at all).

10. In Washington, D.C., many seniors seek to age in their homes and/or communities. What efforts will you take to improve service accessibility, support for families, and the quality of programs offered to the City's senior citizens?

I support Improving outreach to seniors who are isolated to inform them of available services and connect them. I will work to strengthen transportation options, such as Seabury Connector, to help seniors get to appointments and senior wellness centers.

One in six older DC residents is at risk of hunger. I will work to Invest in food security for seniors, including home-delivered meals and meals at senior centers. I will work to improve access to in-home services through DC's Medicaid waiver (EPD), which allows seniors to live independently in the community and not in institutions.

Like other groups, affordable housing is a growing challenge for many seniors. In addition to strengthening rent control, I will work to ensure that DC's housing programs support housing devoted to seniors, particularly LGBTQ seniors.

11. What priority issues inspired your candidacy for political office?

I am a community leader who has devoted the last two decades to promoting economic and racial justice in DC, through my leadership of the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. I bring 20 years of research on DC's most serious inequities -- in housing, schools and jobs -- and 20 years of



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building relationships and coalitions across the city to address them through the DC budget. I have contributed to historic wins for DC residents, like paid family and medical leave, a \$15 minimum wage, changing the school funding to steer more resources to high-poverty schools, and property tax assistance to ensure seniors and lower-income homeowners are not pushed out by rising taxes.

I am running because DC is changing -- and its inequities are getting worse -- but our leaders are not doing enough to address them. Our prosperity has come at the expense of rising homelessness, wider school inequities, displacement of Black and brown residents, inadequate support for immigrants and more. I want to put racial and economic equity at the heart of DC's agenda and tackle DC's biggest challenges at the scale they demand.